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FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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INTERNATIONAL MESH REGULATION BENEFITS NEW ENGLAND HADDOCK FISHERY

New England trawler fishermen are benefiting at the rate of \$1 million per year by the new mesh regulation which went into effect on June 1, 1953, Secretary of the Interior Douglas McKay said today.

The regulation was promulgated by the United States at the recommendation of the International Commission for the North Atlantic Fisheries, which was organized three years ago to study the conservation of groundfish in the Northwest Atlantic now being fished by ten countries.

The regulation requires a minimum size of $4\frac{1}{2}$ inches in the cod ends (terminal bags) of trawl nets used in haddock fishing. Before regulation, the average size used was $2-7/8$ inches.

The regulation is designed to conserve undersize haddock, which were previously destroyed at sea. The saving of these small fish is expected to increase the sustained yield of the haddock stocks by about 30 percent. Over and above this benefit, the large mesh nets are proving more efficient in capturing the larger sizes of haddock and other fish.

During the first seven months of regulation, eight control or study boats were licensed to fish with the old small mesh nets. Using these as a basis of comparison, it was found that the vessels which had converted to large mesh discarded almost no undersized haddock, but at the same time landed more pounds of haddock and other groundfish.

During a three-month study period (October to December 1953), the average catch per trip by the study boats was 68,000 pounds, while the average catch per trip of the converted boats was over 75,000 pounds. The catch of the study boats was down 10 percent over the 1952 period, while the catch of the converted boats held steady.

The landings of groundfish at Boston alone during the three-month period amounted to about 33 million pounds, worth about \$3 million as landed. Had the regulations not been in effect, this amount would have been about 10 percent less, or down by about \$300,000. There is every indication that the advantage enjoyed by large mesh vessels will continue throughout the year, when the benefit to the fishery will be at the rate of \$1,000,000 annually.

Scientists of the Woods Hole, Mass., Laboratory of the Fish and Wildlife Service, under the direction of Dr. Herbert W. Graham, conducted the research leading up to the regulation, and are at present pursuing intensive research to test the effect of the law. The Fish and Wildlife Service is required to report annually to the International Commission.

Observers are sent to sea on commercial trawlers regularly throughout the year to measure the sizes, ages and quantities of fish caught and of fish discarded at sea by both the regulated boats and the study group.